

I am honored to have the opportunity to speak with you today and I am pleased to see so many familiar faces.

I would like to thank Paul Lurie (who could not be here today) for hosting this luncheon along with Marcia Balonick, Linda Sher, Kathy Gurney, and Joy Malkus, the dedicated and competent staff of JACPAC.

I commend the staff, the leadership, and the members of JACPAC for its commitment to an agenda that includes the support of the State of Israel, reproductive choice, and separation of religion and state. I, too, embrace that agenda. I will take a few minutes to address each issue, and then allow time for questions.

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Separation Of Church And State

The original Constitution was written in 1787, ratified in 1788 and the first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights, were added in 1791. The part of the Bill of Rights that is most important to the "separation of church and state" debate -- to paraphrase Jesus, "the rendering unto Caesar and to God that which properly belongs to each" -- is the First Amendment. In particular, the two religion clauses of the first Amendment. These two clauses deal precisely with the issue of what government can and cannot do with respect to religion.

The establishment clause makes up the first ten words of the First Amendment, and reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..." The free exercise clause makes up the next six words of the Amendment, which are: "or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Together, these clauses constitute two sides of the same coin and comprise the most specific statement in the Constitution about the powers of the federal government over religion. The framers of the Constitution gave us maximum freedom on this question -- by neither permitting the establishment of an official religion nor prohibiting anyone from worshiping freely in a manner of their choosing -- which allows us to advance the debate even further. It is interesting to note that both clauses are phrased in the negative, that is, they describe what the federal

government cannot do with respect to religion. It **cannot** establish or tilt the government to officially support any religion; and it

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prohibit a person from worshiping as they understand or wish - or not worshiping at all.

Broadly speaking, two schools of thought grew up around these "religion clauses." Conservative interpreters are generally known as "accommodationists." Liberal interpreters are usually referred to as "separationists."

The accommodationists believe that the Constitution gives government the power to regulate **s**
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aspects of religion. It just cannot establish an official religion or a national church. The separationists believe that the Constitution gives government no power to establish any religious belief or practice by law and that the First Amendment bans all types of interference with religion. I am philosophically aligned with the separationists.

As a United States congressman I use my Christian faith and my Judeo-Christian heritage, principles and moral values to shape and inform my legislative and political decisions, but I do not use my position to impose my religion, heritage or moral values on others through the law. My role as a lawmaking member of Congress is to protect the constitutional rights and fight for equal protection under the law for all of the American people.

When I became a member of Congress, I put my hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. I did not put my hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible, the Torah or the Koran. The people of the Second Congressional District of Illinois did not elect me to be their pastor, priest, rabbi or imam for the purpose of shepherding their souls. They elected me to be their political representative and the guardian of their constitutional rights.

To uphold my oath of office and the Constitution I have to defend the rights of Christians of all denominations, Jews, Muslims and other faiths in America, as well as unbelievers, even hostile unbelievers, agnostics and atheists. The greatness of our country and our Constitution (as amended) is that it puts believers in the position of defending the rights of unbelievers, while unbelievers must defend the rights of believers.

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Reproductive choice

One of the most troubling and explosive current religious and political issues involving both personal ethics and public policy is abortion. Probably no other issue so confuses the American people with regard to "religion and politics" and "church and state" as the issue of abortion. Make no mistake about it, abortion is a morally difficult and religiously troubling issue. Abortion is both a moral, spiritual and religious issue, as well as a legal public policy and political issue.

From a religious or moral point of view, some Americans see abortion as immoral. However, the majority do not see it that way. Plus, in America, under constitutional guidelines, abortion is legal. That is why the choice should be left to an individual's personal conscience rather than having the government impose a collective choice on the individual -- which is anti-choice. Humility and tolerance are necessary around such a highly charged and important issue.

We live under a Constitution and on January 22, 1973 the Supreme Court held in *Roe v. Wade* that abortion, under certain conditions, is legal. Even if I disagreed with that decision -- which I don't -- as a member of Congress I am sworn to uphold the Constitution, not my personal conscience or views.

Some taxpayers will argue that their religious convictions are being violated because they don't want their public tax dollars going to pay for poor peoples' abortions. However, living under a republican or democratic representative form of government doesn't give taxpayers that individual choice. John Q. Public may not want his tax dollars spent on a missile defense system, but if a majority of Congress votes for it and the President signs it into law, that missile defense system will go forward regardless of John Q. Public's religious convictions. In a representative democracy, we don't have a specific choice of how our individual tax dollars are to be spent collectively. Such spending is done within a legal framework by our elected political representatives. If we don't like their choices and priorities we can try to vote them out of office, change choices and get new priorities -- as the public has done with respect to using federal dollars to pay for abortions.

While, as a taxpayer, I disagree with not being able to use federal dollars to pay for abortions if poor or military women voluntarily make that choice, that's the current law and there is nothing this taxpayer can do about it except to continue to fight, within the law, to change the law. I *kno*
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the Supreme Court has said abortions are legal, therefore I

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if abortions are legal for everyone they should be available to anyone. No one should be denied equal protection under the law merely because they are poor or in the military.

Getting beyond the traditional and stereotypical language, I am both pro-choice and pro-life. The real question is whether we see women as whole and equal human beings who can be trusted with the freedom to make their own responsible choices. I believe that abortion is just one (the latest controversial example) of the many choices in life that women must be trusted and respected to make. My pro-choice and pro-life stance also supports legislation and programs that will contribute to the quantity and quality of a baby's, a child's, a young person's, a teenager's, an adult's and older person's entire life. To me, that's the real pro-choice and pro-life position!

Pro-choice is not a pro-abortion position. Being an advocate of choice is not the equivalent of urging women to have abortions. Choosing to have a child, advocating abstinence until marriage, choosing to appropriately educate boys and girls about sex, and teaching young people how to avoid getting pregnant in the first place are all pro-choice and pro-life positions.

The politically conservative position of opposition to legal abortions is anti-choice -- and often anti-life. Not only do the conservative anti-choice people and their congressional representatives oppose the choice of abortion for women, but once a baby is born they're often against virtually everything that would actually give that person a decent quality of life: jobs, minimum and liveable wages, worker rights, equal opportunity, worker safety, comprehensive and universal health care, affordable housing, a high quality public education, protection of the environment, Head Start, Women Infants and Children (WIC), school breakfast and lunch programs, sex education, due process, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. And, after having ignored our youth most of their early years, if they get in trouble as teenagers or young adults, these same conservatives are usually the strongest advocates of lock `em up at any cost law and order and - in the name of pro-life - give them the death penalty.

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Israel

I cannot talk about Israel without first reflecting on my trip last summer.

My trip to Israel, sponsored by AIPAC was a memorable, spiritual, life-changing journey. Along with the AIPAC leadership and staff, I was fortunate to travel with a good portion of the group of constituents that have been advising me on Jewish Community issues for years: Rabbi Paul Caplan, Rabbi Ellen Dreyfus, Judy Fleischer (Executive Director of the JCC), Arlene Freedman (National Board Member of Hadassah), Anne Oppenheimer (National Vice President of NCJW and member of the State Board of AIPAC).

When we were there from August 10th to August 17th, it was a very different time: Hudna ("hood-na") - cease fire,

Abu Mazen in power, a sense of cautious optimism, a little less fear, and freedom to move around the streets a little more.

The trip was packed with speakers, tours, and great meals at various restaurants and homes.

Some of the highlights were:

*A meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

*A meeting with the Palestinian Authority Minister of Finance, Salam Fayyad, who was dedicated to pursuing the roadmap. Mr. Fayyad consolidated the budgets of the West Bank and Gaza into one, and was committed to "full financial disclosure" to the point of posting the budget on a website.

*Dinner at a Moroccan restaurant with Rabbi/Dr. Moshe ("Mo-sheh") Halbertal ("Hal-ber-tall"), author of Israel Defense Force's Code of Ethics, who talked about the rules/ethics of engagement/war.

*A visit to Mt. Harzl ("Hertz-el") National Cemetery where a memorial ceremony was conducted by Rabbis Caplan and Dreyfus at Yithak Rabin's gravesite.

*A visit to Hadassah Medical Center (in Jerusalem) where I observed Israeli and Palestinian physicians working side-by-side and where

Palestinian and Israeli patients are treated equally.

*A visit to the Jerusalem Women's Shelter for battered women and their children.

*A visit to the Immigrant Absorption Center in the suburb of Mevasseret where I saw how refugees are integrated into Israeli society.

*A visit to the Arrow Missile Site.

There were also several tours and visits which clarified the size of Israel compared to its surrounding countries, and the security threats it faces:

*A tour along the security buffer zone (along the West Bank) and view of the security fence.

*A visit to a "classified" army monitoring station, where 18 and 19 year-olds monitored Hizbollah terrorists at the Lebanese border.

*A 20-course dinner at the home of Lior and Orna Weinberg in Metulla, the northernmost town in Israel. Their house is the closest to the Lebanese border (literally a stone's throw away).

*A strategic survey of the border with Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and the border with Syria.

Through these surveys, I gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of Israel's security challenges.

Israel faces a threat to its existence not only along the "Israeli/ Palestinian" front, but along several other fronts. Iran, Syria, and the former Iraqi government all pose significant threats.

Our guide illustrated how Iran supplies the funding and the ideological doctrine; Syria provides logistics; and Hizbollah executes the orders. About 100 to 1000 Hizbollah guerillas are present at the borders. This structure enables Syria to wage war by proxy without having to bear the consequences.

This understanding led me to sign the Syrian Accountability Act. I am also a co-sponsor of H. Con. Res. 332 which expresses the deep concern of Congress regarding Iran's development of nuclear weapons and their continued failure to comply with their safeguard obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On the trip, there were many spiritual experiences, including a visit to Jesus's birthplace, the Christian sites along the Sea of Galilee and in Jerusalem, and welcoming the Jewish Sabbath at the Western Wall.

Perhaps the most profound experience for me was the visit to Yad v'Shem. Yad v'Shem enabled me to FEEL the need for the State of Israel and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to the Jewish people.

I believe that I have always been a supporter of Israel.

I have been a supporter of foreign aid to Israel and of Israel's right to exist and defend itself.

Now I have a deep attachment to Israel for many reasons:

*As a Christian – holy sites.

*As a member of a people who has experienced suffering and understands the need for a safe haven for Jews all over the world.

*And, like so many Israelis to whom we spoke, I have a desire for peace in the region.

I believe peace will improve Israel's economy, and its spirit.

I do not think this will be easy.

I understand the security risks more than ever, and I understand the need for a fence as a means of protection against terrorism.

I understand Israel's right to maintain its identity as a safe haven for the Jewish people.

I hope to return to Israel sometime this year and many times thereafter. I continue to read and study and listen and learn.

I remain steadfast in my quest for peace and pray that the echo of peace resounds throughout the world.